

Infestation

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Summary: Taken from the dramatic cinematic in the middle of the Halo: Combat Evolved storyline, we get a deeper look into the mind of Jenkins and the rest of the squad as they move into the Flood infested base.

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INFESTATION

Based on the Halo: Combat Evolved Cinematic

The Pelican dropship hovered over the festering swamp land that spread for miles around. The engines burned furiously as the pilot wound her way between the gargantuan trees towards the only safe landing spot for miles around. Inside, Sergeant Avery Johnson and his squad readied to disembark, checking their weapons and listening to the heavy rock metal being played through the Pelicans speaker systems. Jenkins looked out over the side of the Pelicans open doors, the swamp land below him. All he knew was that the Covenant had something here that Captain Keyes wanted. He wasn't about to complain, but he saw why the Covenant had chosen this particular place to hide whatever it was, no-one was about to walk into the festering marsh if they could help it.

Vicente turned to Johnson sitting across the Pelican bay from him and shouted over the engines and the music. "Why do we always have to listen to this old stuff Sarge?" Vicente had a distinct dislike of anything made before he was born and music was no exception. However what ever Johnson wanted, Johnsons got.

"Watch your mouth sonâ€|this stuff is your history!" Avery turned to Vicente and spat the remnants of the cigar onto the floor of the Pelican before checking his Assault rifle in his hands, the ammo gauge reading full. "This should remind you grunts what we are fighting to protect!" He cast an eye over the rest of the squad and

chuckled.

Vicente sighed, "If the Covenant wants to wipe out this particular part of my history, its fine by me". He laughed and turned to Jenkins who was fixing the recording device in his helmet, it had been playing up since they were rescued by the Chief a couple of days ago. He'd meant to have it fixed, but no-one knew how.

"Yeah, better it than us" said Jenkins. He wasn't paying attention, and avoided the annoyed stare of Avery.

"You ask them real nicely next time Vicente, I'm sure they'd be happy to oblige." Avery leaned forwards and laughed at the two marines opposite him. These guys had no idea about history; they were caught up in the war and the battles. No-one bothered to read any more.

Suddenly, the pilot broke through on the radio, drowning out the music to the marine's silent relief. "LZ looks clearâ€¦I'm bringing us down". The Pelican started to lower quicker, before it hovered mere feet from the surface of a boggy pool of water. All manner of wild foliage growing beneath the surface, the marines stood and held onto the straps behind their heads before Avery shouted and they jumped from the Pelican's bay and landed with a splash in the water below.

The Pelican started to raise again, Avery's radio buzzing for a second while the pilot relayed the co-ordinates of the pick up once they had finished. The marine's meanwhile had spread out and created a perimeter around the landing zone, each of them clicking on their rifles torch lights and lighting the gloom around the swamps edges. Nothing seemed to have heard them land, all that echoed from the jungle was the sounds of insects. It would have been a welcome sound, but the absence of Covenant in the area immediately made most of them think something was wrong.

Avery walked forwards, stuffing the cigar in his hands into his pockets. He tapped Jenkins on the shoulder and signalled for him to move up to a nearby ridge, the rest followed suit. He was hesitant to use speech, or radios to communicate. The Covenant had a knack of intercepting their transmissions and it wasn't good to be surprised in such a place, especially with the wealth of ambush spots throughout the tightly packed trees. The squad moved as one, keeping watch on the surroundings, watching every point for signs of activity, still nothing made itself known. They reached the ridge and looked down on the entrance to the complex they had seen from above. Keyes was adamant that this was the place, and for Avery it seemed logical, after all why would you think anyone would hide something out here in the middle of nowhere.

Suddenly Jenkins stopped and signalled to Johnson behind him to halt. The whole team immediately turned in the direction Jenkins was pointing his rifle. A Covenant Dropship was standing in the clearing ahead of them; engines still running and access ramps down. They moved closer, there was no sign of life from the dropship itself. Avery turned to the squad and told them to split up, covering both flanks of the ship. They split immediately, Vicente taking the right flank and Avery the left. Jenkins moved past the dropship's open ramps and saw traces of blood and a discarded plasma pistol lying just down from the ramp. He turned to Vicente, who nodded and moved

off round the back of the dropship, while Jenkins covered his back.

The back however has just the same, Avery signalled for the squad to hold. He stood and took a closer look at the traces of blood on the dropship's ramps. It was certainly Grunt blood, there seemed to have been an entire team of them from this dropship. There wasn't any Elite blood anywhere though, which meant that somewhere out there was an Elite or team of Elites. After all, no Grunts were sent into battle without a leader, they were too easy to panic. Avery turned and signalled for the team to move on towards the building. He didn't want to spend more time than was needed here, after all Keyes was coming in soon and they needed to secure the location for his team.

They moved back towards the structure, which bore the signs of Covenant activity. Plasma turrets stood active at the entrances, and energy shield were online nearby. And yet, there was still no resistance from any enemy forces. Avery turned to his right; Mendoza was watching the rear for signs of activity, especially from the abandoned dropship. "Mendoza, move it up!" The marine turned and took up a position in the entrance way, the rest of his second team followed suit. "Stay here and wait for the Captain and his squad, then get your ass inside."

"Sir!" Mendoza saluted with his free hand and called his team in close to disable the turrets from being used.

"Ok, let's move!" Avery turned to the rest of the team and signalled for them to move forwards, into the building itself. He cast an eye behind to Mendoza watching the exit. He hoped that this wasn't going to take long; he couldn't risk getting his squad stuck in here if an ambush happened. Something didn't seem right; he knew it in his bones.

The elevator slide to a halt, the squad swaying to keep their balance as the thing came to a stop. They had abandoned the formations; there had been nothing now for a while. They jumped from the elevator and landed on the metallic floor of the structure. They could hear the whir of machinery around them, but nothing Covenant even now. Slowly they moved forwards, rounding a corner to see a locked door flanked on either side by energy shields. Again, the traces of blood were covering the floor and walls, something seriously wrong had happened here. This time it was Jackal and Elite blood that stained the floor, and still no bodies to account for. Vicente got to work on the door, putting the lock splitter against the electronic door and punching in the commands to override the locks. It slide open grudgingly and a foul smell poured from the room on the other side. The squad held their hands over their mouths trying not to gag in reflex, even Avery turned away from the smell. It smelt distinctly like dead bodies, coming from the room ahead.

They moved in, holding their breath. Inside the room was a war zone. Consoles and covenant crates were thrown around the room; the whole floor was covered in a sticky residue that reminded Jenkins of sick. They could now see where the smell was coming from. At the other side of the room was a stack of bodies, Grunts, Jackals, Elites all piled high against the wall. They moved forwards, covering the exits from

the room, the green lights flashing invitingly. On the ground before them was the body of an Elite, contorted in terror. It didn't look burnt, and bore no signs of being hit by human weaponry. The only wound was a giant gash they stretched from the top of its chest to its stomach, spilling its guts around it.

Vicente kicked the body "This is weirdâ€|right, something scrambled the insides." He bent down and examined the cuts along the edges; it did look like something powerful.

Avery grimaced. "What's thatâ€|plasma scoring?" He looked to Cortez across the room who was leaning against a bloody wall.

"I dunno, maybe an accident, friendly fire or something?" He looked at Johnson who seemed puzzled by this. He understood why, the Covenant didn't usually make mistakes, and friendly fire shouldn't have occurred in a small patrol squad.

"What do we have Sergeant?" The entire room stood to attention as Keyes made his way through the open door, flanked by his own squad of marines. He had shunned the captain's uniform for a bullet-proof vest and his pistol holstered at his side.

"Looks like a Covenant patrol, all bad ass Elite units, all KIA." Avery looked down at the corpse again and then motioned to the wall behind them.

"Real pretty" Keyes knelt next to the corpse and examined the wound before looking up at Vicente. "Friend of yours?" He chuckled lightly. The squad laughed nervously; there was something eerie about this place.

"Nahh, we just met." Vicente said under his breath. He looked up at Jenkins opposite him; they were both feeling the same thing. There was something down here that that was either not Covenant or Human, or a rebel element of the former. Vicente knew that the Covenant had energy swords, maybe this could have been it, and maybe they had fought each other over the prize in the structure?

Keyes moved off with Johnson, talking feverously about something. They spoke in whispers, obviously it was something of importance that the rest of them couldn't or shouldn't know. Vicente stepped over the corpse of the Elite beneath them and stood next to Cortez and Jenkins. "What do you think they are talking about?"

Cortez swallowed and looked up from the sickening scene of the Elite. "Probably the Chief, I heard he was sent to find the control room to this ring world."

Jenkins nodded. "Yeah, I'd imagine its some information of how it's going for them. After all, Chiefs got Cortana with him. We can't have anything happen to her." He shut up quickly, Johnson and Keyes had turned round and were coming back, the Captain pulling his pistol from the holster and loading a clip into it.

"Right lad, we're goin on down. We are to find the source of the disturbance and secure the position, before Covenant forces are able to re-group." He signalled for the squad to move out, past the pile of bodies in the corner of the room and through the green lighted door. Keyes followed, his squad surrounding the captain as they moved

through the tight tunnels.

They moved through move of the same, room after room of corpses. Sometime however they would find rooms with no bodies at all, just trails of green slime that covered the walls and floors and mixed with the blood of the Covenant. The structure was getting weirder and weirder by the minute. As they passed through a large chamber that held a science lab of some sorts the lights shut down completely sending the entire room into pitch blackness. The entire team froze and switched on their lights. A strange noise echoed in the darkness, but nothing showed up as they passed the lights around the room. Jenkins was sure he saw something jump quickly away as he passed the light over the way they had just came, but as soon as it appeared it vanished.

The lights slammed back on again a moment later, the room was the same, and nothing had come through. Johnson reached into his pocket and pulled out the cigar, now bent awkwardly a shoved it into his mouth. If he was going down, he was going down with the sweet taste of tobacco in his mouth, he didn't smoke them anymore, he just enjoyed the taste. They moved on, slower than before, going deeper and deeper into the facility towards the source of the energy that had spiked on the readings. It seemed more trouble than it was worth down here, whatever the Covenant had stored down here better be worth the risk, something had certainly burst its way through here and killed the resisting Covenant between it and the source.

It wasn't long before they reached the source. The squad filing into the passages that led down to a locked door at the bottom. The viewing platform above had shown an empty room on the other side of the door, with a few more leading off from the inside. The weapon or energy source was certainly inside this room, the scanner in Keyes hand was going crazy. Vicente bent down and looked at the door in front of him, before turning and looking puzzled at Johnsons face.

Keyes looked up and pointed to the door. "Right, wellâ€¦let's get this door open." He was sweating slightly, stuffing the scanner into his vest pocket and signalling for the marine to get the door unlocked.

"I'll try sir, but it looks like these Covenant tried pretty hard to lock it down." Vicente placed the pad on the door and stood back. The Covenant had placed a lot of security codes over the door; there was no way it could have been opened by the console upstairs. This must have been to keep the weapon secure, or as Vicente now imagined, to keep something in.

"Just do it son". Keyes growled at Vicente, there was going to be nothing that would stand between him and whatever the Covenant were hiding behind this door. It could change their favours in this resistance for the better.

Vicente gave a look to Jenkins before bending down over the pad and overloading the security systems in the doors electronics to force them open. The door slid open, revealing the cold room ahead of them. He ushered the rest of the squad forwards, and as one they piled into

the room. They took up firing positions around Keyes and Johnson, scanning the locked doors all around them, something didn't feel right. Keyes and Johnson walked in and looked at the doors, Keyes had realised that's this wasn't what he was looking for.

Mendoza clicked the safety from his rifle and muttered. "I got a bad feeling about this." He forced himself into a firing position and kept his rifle trained on the door ahead of him. Something kept catching his eye from the other side.

Suddenly, their radios blared with the sound of gunfire, deafening them. They all hunched over as the screams of marines blared through the channel. Static filled their ear pieces. "Sarge, we got contactsâ€¦LOTS OF THEM! There comingâ€¦.They aint Covenant." Suddenly the voices died in a haze of static and a slobbering sound issued down the radios followed by the screams of the dying marine.

The entire team turned to look at Keyes and Johnson, who were looking worried. "Mendoza, get your ass back up to second platoon and see what the hell is going on" Mendoza turned to complain. "I don't have time for your lip soldierâ€¦I gave you an order!" He lifted his rifle and glared at the marine who looked like he'd seen a ghost.

Jenkins held his hand up; something was coming from within the rooms nearby. "Sirâ€¦listen."

Cortez stood and lowered his rifle "What the hell is thatâ€¦"

Johnson growled "Where's that coming from Mendoza?" Something was certainly in the room with them; a squelching sound came from nearby.

Mendoza looked back towards the nearby door. "I don't knowâ€¦wait, there!" The door ahead of them crashed open suddenly, expelling dozens of small insect like creatures onto the floor. The entire squad turned to the door.

Cortez suddenly fell to the floor, one of the creatures latched onto his neck. Vicente jumped towards him dropping his rifle and trying frantically to pull it off. "Aughh, get it off!" He cried.

Vicente pulled and tugged at the creature, which seemed to have lodged small tentacles into Cortez's neck. "Hold stillâ€¦Hold still!"

Johnson aimed his rifle and let a few rounds burst one of the creatures apart. "Ok peopleâ€¦open fire!" He shouted, before turning back to aim at one of the creatures that had latched onto Mendoza in front of him.

Jenkins turned to see Keyes shooting his pistol wildly and Vicente firing madly at the doorway. He tried to move back towards the doorway they had come through but it had locked tight.

Johnson turned to him still firing hot lead into the creatures. "Jenkins! Fire your weapon!"

Jenkins raised his rifle, but it was too late. Two of the creatures

latched onto his back and he felt a slithering thing enter through his armour and into his skin. He felt his knees go weak and he collapsed to the floor, dropping his rifle. His helmet flew off suddenly as he hit the floor, the creatures still swarming around them; he was suddenly taken by an overwhelming darkness in his vision. He could hear the marines around him shouting and Johnson barking orders for them to keep firing, the last thing he glimpsed was Mendoza running to the door behind him and slamming his fist against the locked exit. He slipped away, the screams echoing in his ears.

THE END?

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